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TAGS: PREL KNNP ETTC MASS SY IR EG RS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI POL-MIL BUREAU CHIEF ON RUSSIAN ASSISTANCE  
TO IRAN, SYRIA, EGYPT AND INDIA

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d)

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SUMMARY  
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**¶1.** (S) On January 8, Israeli MOD Political-Military Bureau Chief Amos Gilad shared with the Ambassador the results of his recent visit to Russia and meetings with Russian intelligence officials to discuss Iran and Syria. Gilad said that the Russians believe it will take twice as long as the Israelis estimate for Iran to achieve a nuclear weapons capability. His sense is that because they do not feel as pressed for time as Israel and the U.S., the Russians prefer to delay efforts of the U.S. and like-minded countries to get Iran to stop its nuclear weapons program. Gilad said the Russians made it clear to him that they are more afraid of a military strike on Iran -- which they believe would further destabilize the region -- than Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon. The Russians plan to continue with the building of the Bushehr reactor in Iran, and are concerned that sanctions will only further radicalize Iran. Gilad's Russian interlocutors told him that President Putin warned Syrian President Assad that Syria-Russia relations would be damaged if the Syrians transfer any more Russian arms to Hizballah. The Russians also told Gilad they will no longer provide "offensive" arms to Syria, but still intend to supply Syria and Iran with "defensive" weapons systems, including sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles. Gilad said the Russians pressed him to secure GOI agreement to mount Israeli radars on Russian MiG-29's they hope to sell to India, and reacted with consternation when he told them Israel could not agree to providing the radars as they contain sensitive U.S. content. According to Gilad, the Russians said they will reluctantly support U.S.-India civil nuclear cooperation and plan to provide similar assistance to Egypt. END SUMMARY.

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GILAD: RUSSIANS ARE USING IRAN AGAINST THE U.S.  
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**¶2.** (S) Noting that it was his first visit to Russia, Gilad said that he met with Russians that "Israelis usually do not meet with" during his three-days in the country. His interlocutors included officials from the Russian Defense Ministry, the head of Russian military intelligence (GRU), a General Dmitriev (whom Gilad characterized as an important figure in Russia's weapons supply chain), a Mr. Chemtsov (whom Gilad described as a close friend of President Putin), Deputy National Security Advisor Nazarov, and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak. Gilad said that Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov declined to meet with him. As a result of his

many meetings, Gilad came away with the view that Russia hates the U.S., wants to become an empire again, and feels empowered because of its oil: "They see cooperation with the U.S. as endangering their own strategic interests. They see the U.S. as very weak and tied down in Iraq. They see NATO pinned down in Afghanistan, and Israel struggling with terrorism." Gilad said that his very candid, 90-minute meeting with GRU chief Korabelnikov convinced him that the GRU remains as hostile to the U.S. and Israel as during the Soviet period. He added that his Russian interlocutors view Israel as part of Russia's "empire," as Israel contains, in their view, a million former Russian citizens.

¶ 13. (S) On Iran, Gilad said his impression is that Russia is more active in Iran than he previously thought, and that it is using Iran against the U.S. Gilad said he was told that Russia does not want to see Iran obtain a military nuclear capability, but is more fearful of a military attack on Iran that would, in Russia's view, destabilize Iran and the region. Gilad noted that the Russians appear less concerned than the U.S. and Israel on the timeline, as Russia believes that Iran is far from possessing the required technology, and has not yet produced type P-2 centrifuges. Russia, he said, believes that it will take Iran twice as long as Israeli estimates to achieve a nuclear weapons capability. Gilad suggested that this means Russia feels it has some breathing space with which to use Iran against the U.S. He said he was also told by his interlocutors that Russia intends to proceed with constructing the research reactor at Bushehr, despite recent delays due to shortages of electricity and money.

¶ 14. (S) Russia, he said, clearly believes it can resolve the Iran nuclear crisis diplomatically and has the time to do so. He said his Russian interlocutors, while conveying a sense

of power, seemed concerned that sanctions would radicalize Iran further, and believe that Iran is determined to obtain a military nuclear capability. His interlocutors told him that Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Larijani favors an international, diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis. They said that Russia has no evidence that Iran has a clandestine nuclear program. Instead, Gilad's interlocutors said that they believe Iran wants to be on the brink of having a nuclear military capability -- what Gilad termed, "the Japanese option." Gilad said the Russians told him they are still trying to convince Iran to agree to enrich uranium in Russia, but that to date, the Iranians have said they will never agree to discuss the Russian offer, even if it is meant to preserve their national honor.

¶ 15. (S) Gilad said that his interlocutors refused to answer his question on whether they would supply missiles to Iran. Gilad interpreted this as meaning that they will provide anti-aircraft systems, including sophisticated ones similar to the Patriot anti-missile system.

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RUSSIA TO SUPPLY SYRIA WITH "DEFENSIVE" WEAPONS  
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¶ 16. (S) Gilad said that his Russian interlocutors told him that Russia would no longer transfer offensive weapon systems to Syria, but would continue to provide Syria with sophisticated "defensive" weapons, and plan to upgrade Syria's anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). He stressed that this will bolster Syrian confidence unhelpfully. According to Gilad, the Russians were "very angry" with Syria for transferring Russian weapons to Hizballah during the Second Lebanon War. He was told that Putin warned Syrian President Assad that another such incident would "damage Russian-Syrian relations." Gilad said the Russians told him they will not supply the Syrians with S-300 anti-aircraft missiles, "Igla" man-portable air defense systems, or "Iskander" SCUD-like surface-to-surface missiles.

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RUSSIAN COOPERATION WITH EGYPT AND INDIA  
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¶ 7. (S) According to Gilad, the Russians told him they will offer Egypt civilian nuclear capabilities in a cooperative effort with the U.S. The Russians justified this planned transfer of technology on the basis that it is an "economic issue," and that the knowledge, technology, and know-how offered will comply with international conventions. Gilad said that in off-line discussions, his Russian interlocutors told him they suspect Egyptian intentions, but did not elaborate.

¶ 8. (S) Gilad said that he discussed with his Russian interlocutors Israel's growing relationship with India. He said the Russians did not express concern with this, but criticized the new strategic relationship between the U.S and India. At the same time, his interlocutors told him that Russia will reluctantly support U.S. civil nuclear cooperation with India because Russia views it as a "special case." India is acting responsibly in the nuclear arena and it genuinely needs civil nuclear power for electricity. The Russians told Gilad that they are pleased with the standards of inspection established for India, and that Russia will be cooperative within the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as India is not a proliferator.

¶ 9. (S) According to Gilad, the Russians pressed him on Israel's unwillingness to mount radars on MiG-29's it hopes to sell to India, and expressed consternation when he explained to them that Israel cannot supply the radars as they contain sensitive U.S. content.

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